

EYES ON THE MAOBADI:

4 Reasons Nepal's Revolution Matters

By Mike Ely

Something remarkable is happening. A whole generation of people has never seen a radical, secular, revolutionary movement rise with popular support. And yet here it is – in Nepal today. This movement has overthrown Nepal's hated King Gyanendra and abolished the medieval monarchy. It has created a revolutionary army that now squares off with the old King's army. It has built parallel political power in remote rural areas over a decade of guerrilla war – undermining feudal traditions like the caste system. It has gathered broad popular support and emerged as the leading force of an unprecedented Constituent Assembly (CA). And it has done all this under the radical banner of Maoist communism — advocating a fresh attempt at socialism and a classless society around the world.

People in Nepal call these revolutionaries the Maobadi.

Another remarkable thing is the silence surrounding all this. There has been very little reporting about the intense moments now unfolding in Nepal, or about the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) that stand at their center. Meanwhile, the nearby Tibetan uprisings against abuses by China's government got non-stop coverage.

There are obvious reasons for this silence. The Western media isn't thrilled when people in one of the world's poorest countries throw their support behind one of the world's most radical movements.

But clearly many alternative news sources don't quite know what to make of the Nepali revolution. The Maobadi's mix of communist goals and non-dogmatic methods disturb a lot of leftist assumptions too. When the CPN(Maoist) launched an armed uprising in 1996, some people thought these were outdated tactics. When the CPN(Maoist) suspended armed combat in 2006 and entered an anti-monarchist coalition government, some people assumed they would lose their identity to a corrupt cabal. When the Maoists press their current anti-feudal program, some people think they are forgetting about socialism.

But silent skepticism is a wrong approach. The world needs to be watching Nepal. The stunning Maoist victory in the April elections was not, yet, the decisive victory over conservative forces. The Maobadi are at the center of the political staqe but they have not yet defeated or dismantled the old government's army. New tests of strength lie ahead.

The Maoists of Nepal aren't just a opposition movement any more – they are tackling the very different problems of leading a society through a process of radical change. They are maneuvering hard to avoid a sudden crushing defeat at the hands of powerful armies. As a result, the Maobadi of Nepal are carrying out tactics for isolating their internal rivals, broadening their appeal, and neutralizing external enemies.

All this looks bewildering seen up close. This world has been through a long, heartless stretch without much radicalism or revolution. Most people have never seen what it looks like when a popular communist revolution reaches for power.

Let's break the silence by listing four reasons for looking closely at Nepal.

Reason #1

Here are communists who have discarded rigid thinking, but not their radicalism.

Leaders of the CPN(Maoist) say they protect the living revolution "from the revolutionary phrases we used to memorize."

The Maobadi took a fresh and painstakingly detailed look at their society. They identified which conditions and forces imposed the horrific poverty on the people. They developed creative methods for connecting deeply with the discontent and highest hopes of people. They have generated great and growing influence over the last fifteen years.

To get to the brink of power, this movement fused and alternated different forms of struggle. They started with a great organizing drive, followed by launching a guerrilla war in 1996, and then entering negotiations in 2006. They created new revolutionary governments in remote base areas over ten years, and followed up with a political offensive to win over new urban support. They have won victory in the special election in April, and challenged their foot-dragging opponents by threatening to launching mass mobilizations in the period ahead. They reached out broadly, without abandoning their armed forces or their independent course.

The Maobadi say they have the courage "to climb the unexplored mountain." They insist that com-

munism needs to be reconceived. They believe popular accountability may prevent the emergence of arrogant new elites. They reject the one-party state and call for a socialist process with multi-party elections. They question whether a standing army will serve a new Nepal well, and advocate a system of popular militias. And they want to avoid concentrating their hopes in one or two leaders-for-life, but instead will empower a rising new generation of revolutionary successors.

Nepal is in that bottom tier of countries called the "fourth world" – most people there suffer in utter poverty. It is a world away from the developed West, and naturally the political solutions of the Nepali Maoists' may not apply directly to countries like the U.S. or Britain. But can't we learn from the freshness they bring to this changing world?

Will their reconception of communism succeed? It is still impossible to know. But their attempt itself already has much to teach.

Reason #2

Imagine Nepal as a Fuse Igniting India

Nepal is such a marginalized backwater that it is hard to imagine its politics having impact outside its own borders. The country is poor, landlocked, remote and only the size of Arkansas. Its 30 million people live pressed between the world's most populous giants, China and India.

But then consider what Nepal's revolution might mean for a billion people in nearby India.

A new Nepal would have a long open border with some of India's most impoverished areas. Maoist armed struggle has smoldered in those northern Indian states for decades – with roots among Indian dirt farmers. Conservative analysts sometimes speak of a "red corridor" of Maoist-Naxalite guerrilla zones running through central India, north to south, from the Nepali border toward the southern tip.

Understanding the possibilities, Nepal's Maobadi made a bold proposal: that the revolutionary movements across South Asia should consider merging their countries after overthrowing their governments and creating a common regional federation. The Maobadi helped form the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA) in 2001, which brought together ten different revolutionary groupings from throughout the region.

A future revolutionary government in Nepal will have a hard time surviving alongside a hostile India. It could face demands, crippling embargos and perhaps even invasion. But at the very same time, such a revolution could serve as an inspiration and a base area for revolution in that whole region. It could impact the world.

Reason #3

Nepal shows that a new, radically better world is possible

Marx once remarked that the revolution burrows unseen underground and then bursts into view to cheers of "Well dug, old mole!" We have all been told that radical social change is impossible. Rebellion

against this dominant world order has often seemed marked by backward-looking politics, xenophobia, lowered sights and Jihadism. And yet, here comes that old mole popping up in Nepal — offering a startling glimpse of how people can transform themselves and their world.

Some of the world's poorest and most oppressed people have set out in the Nepali highlands to remake everything around them — through armed struggle, political power, and collective labor. Farming people, who are often half-starved and illiterate have formed peoples courts and early agricultural communes. Wife beating and child marriage are being challenged. Young men and women have joined the revolutionary army to defeat their oppressors. There is defiance of arranged marriage and a blossoming of "love matches," even between people of different castes. There is a rejection of religious bigotry and the traditions of a Hindu monarchy. The 40 ethnic groups of Nepal are negotiating new relations based on equality and a sharing of political power.

All this is like a wonderful scent upon the wind. You are afraid to turn away, unless it might suddenly disappear.

Reason #4

When people dare to make revolution – they must not stand alone

These changes would have been unthinkable, if the CPN(Maoist) had not dared to launch a revolutionary war in 1996. And their political plan became reality because growing numbers of people dared to throw their lives into the effort. It is hard to exaggerate the hope and courage that has gripped people.

Events may ultimately roll against those hopes. This revolution in Nepal may yet be crushed or even betrayed from within. Such dangers are inherent and inevitable in living revolutions.

If the Maobadi pursue new leaps in their revolutionary process, they will likely face continuing attacks from India, backed by the U.S. The CPN(Maoist) has long been (falsely!) labeled "terrorists" by the U.S. government. They are portrayed as village bullies and exploiters of child-soldiers by some human rights organizations. Western powers have armed Nepal's pro-royal National army with modern weapons. A conservative mass movement in Nepal's fertile Terai agricultural area has been encouraged by India and Hindu fundamentalists.

Someone needs to spread the word of what is actually going on. It would be intolerable if U.S.-backed destabilization and suppression went unopposed in the U.S. itself.

Here it is: A little-known revolution in Nepal.

Who will we tell about it? What will we learn from it? What will we do about it?

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